

(Peter) Wyckoff House,  
5902 Canarsie Lane,  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

HABS No. 4-28

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4  
Southern New York State

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,  
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

THE WYCKOFF HOUSE  
Brooklyn, New York.

Date of Erection: About 1739 ?

Present Condition: The present condition of the house is very bad, the present owners not having given any attention to preservation during their ownership covering the last ten years. The house looks as though it had not received the care and attention it so well deserves.

The roof of the main portion which originally was shingle, is covered with a tar and felt slate surfaced roofing paper and this portion is the only tight roof on the house and because of this the interior of the main portion is in fairly good condition although brutally marred by the present occupants through the application of hideous colors of paint to the interior.

Number of Stories: One and one-half.

Materials of construction: The outstanding feature of the construction is a framework of hand-hewn oak timbers fastened together with wooden pine or handmade nails. The construction of the frame is interesting in that sturdy oak posts carry up thru the building and tie into and form part of the bracing and framing in the attic for the roof construction. All this is clearly shown on the measured drawings.

The floors are of oak planking varying from one and one-half inches to two inches in thickness and in widths up to seventeen inches, these are shimmed up from the tops of the oak timbers supporting them so that tops of planks are level.

Oak planks similar to those referred to above form an important part of the construction of the chimneys in the main portion of the house. These chimneys being built at an angle beyond the center of gravity are dependent solely upon the sturdy oak plank which is supported and secured at floor and roof, and would topple over but for this support.

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In these days such construction would not be permitted because of the possibility of such a support being weakened or destroyed in case of fire.

Another interesting feature of construction is the filling of the walls with brick and mud, the latter being of a yellowish color and having mixed with it a certain percentage of grass.

The walls under the main excavated portion of the house are of heavy field stone laid up in mortar, while those under the unexcavated portions are of stone and laid up dry.

The stonework of the chimney appearing on the exterior, above grade, is a selected stone brownish in color and laid up in a white cement mortar.

The exterior walls of the main portion of the house are of hand-made shingles, unpainted; in fact, the entire exterior is without paint, excepting the doors and windows.

The balance of the house (excepting the westerly wall of the kitchen extension, under the roof and to roof of storage room) is of clapboard. This may have been shingle originally like the main portion; but such an assumption seems doubtful.

Other existing records: Written Records: VanWyck, "Keshbauge, or The First White Settlement on Long Island". 1924, Putman. Old Photograph.

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Historical data referred to herein was obtained from "Keskachauge, or The First White Settlement on Long Island", by Frederick VanWyck, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1924, p.284 to 314.

The author of the above says "That the main part of the house is not an old one, or was built after May 8, 1784, the author does not believe. Thirty-five or forty years ago, when he saw it daily from the train it stood in a countryside of old houses.

If it was not easily the oldest house in that countryside with the possible exception of the "Sand Hole House" already mentioned, the house on ex-mayor Samuel Smith's farm in Gravesend, near Bensonhurst, and the Stoothoff House on Bergen Island, its appearance was deceptive."

A further statement contained in the book above referred to is also worthy of notice and for that reason is given herein.

"The author has not had an opportunity to interview the members of the Wyckoff family, former owners of the house, for further information regarding the tradition that the house was once Van Twiller's.

"Mr. John Vanderveer of West Islip, L. I. recalls that Mr. Abraham J. Wyckoff on a trip to the mill once said to Mr. Vanderveer, 'you know we live in Governor Van Twiller's House'.

"It is possible but improbable in view of the claim made on April 23, 1791 by or in behalf of the proprietors of the town that the land on which the house stands was then undivided land, that the Wyckoffs built the house between Oct. 4, 1687 and April 23, 1719.

"If the house was built after April 23, 1719, it is improbable that the Wyckoffs built it before April 23, 1739, that is, before another twenty years had run against the claim of the proprietors of the town to own the land on which the house stands, as that claim was evidenced by the map of the 1719 division.

"It is possible but improbable under this theory that the Wyckoffs built the house after April 23, 1739 and before May 8, 1784, that is before the thirty freeholders had in effect acknowledged by the wording of the description in their deed of that date to Peter Wyckoff, that he owned the land on the northwest of the land described in that deed."

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In that time, all Dutch houses were built facing the south; and the Wyckoff house is no exception to this rule, the rear of the house facing Canarsie Lane.

It is interesting to note that the shingles were applied over and secured to irregularly cut and shaped oak strips one and one-half inches or more in depth and thickness; Age has greatly hardened these strips. The writer is informed that in cutting thru these strips, while building a bathroom addition on the easterly end, workmen broke an ax and several saws. (The bathroom addition was added since survey was started.)

An old photograph shows a porch with columns on the southerly side of the house where the present stoop exists, otherwise the house appears as originally built, except for the grade lines which seem to have raised at the westerly end.

The old house, after having weathered several centuries of storms and havoc caused by the elements, is, in spite of the neglect and indifference of its present and previous owners, still proudly trying to stand up in its decrepit state; but unless some attention is given it very soon it will go the way of those once fine and sturdy structures which now are only a memory to the oldest inhabitants.

Written, June 11, 1934, by

Fred Kayser, Reg. Architect  
2629 Sedgwick Avenue, N.Y.C.

Edited April 23, 1935.

HABS National Headquarters.

*Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.*